

THE
DEFENDERS

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THE DEFENDERS™

NIGHTHAWK ATTACKS
US WITH POWERS FAR
STRONGER THAN OURS!

THEN...THOSE POWERS
HAVE DRIVEN HIM
MAD!

**NIGHTHAWK
NO MORE!**

The mysterious **DR. STRANGE!** The vibrant **VALKYRIE!** The high-flying **NIGHTHAWK!** The incredible **HULK!** Evil-doers **TREMBLE** at the names—for these four form the crux of the greatest **NON-TEAM** in history, heroes called together only when the need arises—to battle **MENACES** that threaten the security—or the very **LIFE**—of the planet **EARTH!**

Stan Lee
PRESENTS: **THE DYNAMIC DEFENDERS!**™

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NIGHTHAWK'S BRAIN!

IT IS EVERYWHERE COLD AND BLACK, AND THE CHILL PERVADES NOT MERELY THE AIR, BUT THE SKIN AND BONES AND SOULS OF THOSE WHO BREATHE IT.

NIGHTHAWK
CRIES TO HIS
FELLOW-DEFENDERS
FOR AID.

DR. STRANGE,
SEEKER OF
COSMIC TRUTH,
DOESN'T WANT
TO KNOW.

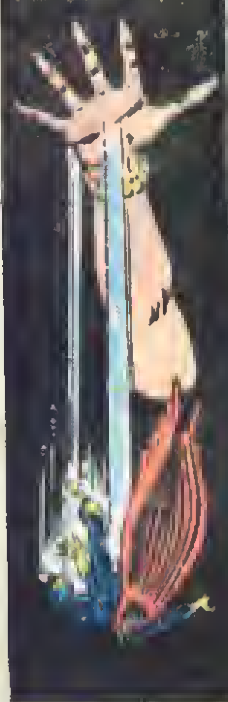
THE HULK,
MIGHTIEST OF
EARTHBOY
MORTALS, CASTS
HIS EMERALD
EYES AWAY.

VALKYRIE,
WOMAN WARRIOR,
EVINCES ONLY
SCORN.

AND THE FRIGID FINGERS ON THE ICY HAND OF THE DISEMBODIED ARM TIGHTEN THEIR GRIP... UNTIL HE FEELS HIS RIBS ABOUT TO CRACK.

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BUT JUST AS THE PAIN BECOMES UNBEARABLE, SHE DROPS HIM LIKE A WINGED HOT POTATO.



NEVER A BELIEVER IN BOTTOMLESS PITS, HE ACTIVATES HIS JET-PACK.



THERE'S A WAY OUT OF HERE, THERE MUST BE.

AND HE'S GOING TO...

BUT HIS SEARCH IS INTERRUPTED. RUDELY.



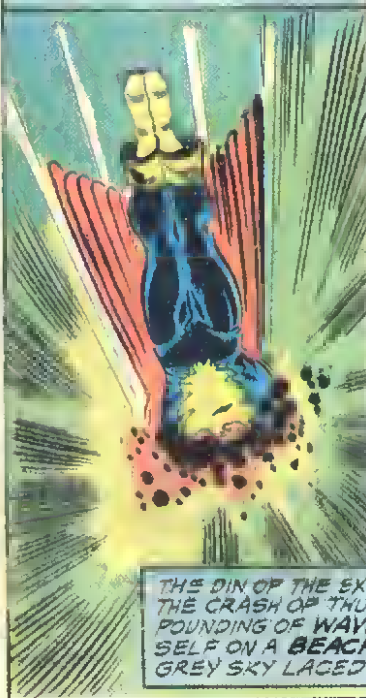
BY THE BELLOW OF EXPLOSIVES AND A BARRAGE OF RED-HOT METAL.

THE EXPLOSION BECOMES A VORTEX OF LIGHT AND SOUND, OBLITERATING THE NOTHINGNESS...



SUCKING HIM IN, DRAWING HIM TOWARD A BECKONING FIGURE AT ITS EYE.

A GRIM RESIGNATION SEIZES HIS SPIRIT. HE HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO SEE THIS THROUGH. HE SURRENDERS, AND PLUNGES HEAD-LONG INTO THE MAELSTROM.



THE DIN OF THE EXPLOSION BECOMES THE CRASH OF THUNDER AND THE POUNDING OF WAVES. HE FINDS HIMSELF ON A BEACH, BENEATH A BLEAK GREY SKY LACED WITH LIGHTNING.



AND BEFORE HIM STANDS THE LISSOME FORM OF TRISH STARR, SILENT, ALOOF, IMPLACABLE.





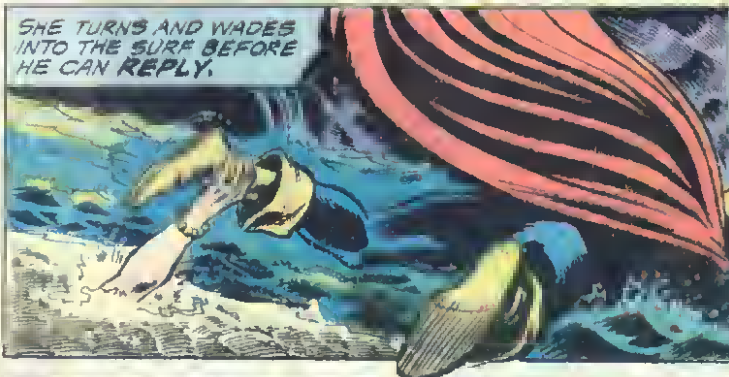
"CAN'T YOU HEAR ME?" HE CRIES, RUSHING TOWARD HER, NOT FULLY CERTAIN HE HAS SPOKEN BEFORE.



THE WIND CATCHES HER GOSBAMER CAPE, LIFTS IT TO REVEAL THE LEFT ARM SHE NO LONGER POSSESSES.

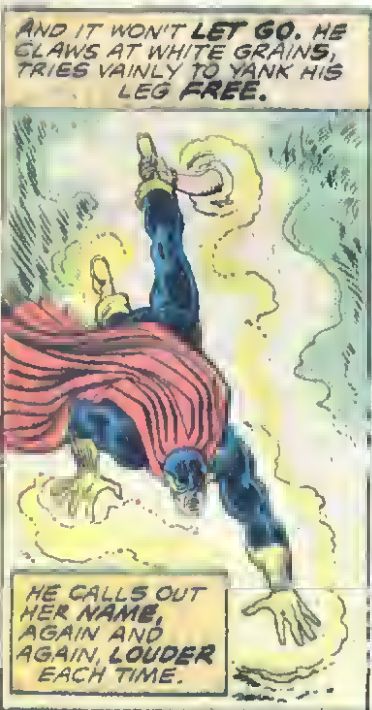


WHY, KYLE? WHY DID YOU LET IT HAPPEN?



SHE TURNS AND WADES INTO THE SURF BEFORE HE CAN REPLY.

AND WHEN HE ATTEMPTS TO FOLLOW, SOMETHING RISES FROM THE SAND--CLUTCHES AT HIS ANKLE. HE STUMBLES, FALLS.



AND IT WON'T LET GO. HE CLAWS AT WHITE GRAINS, TRIES VAINLY TO YANK HIS LEG FREE.

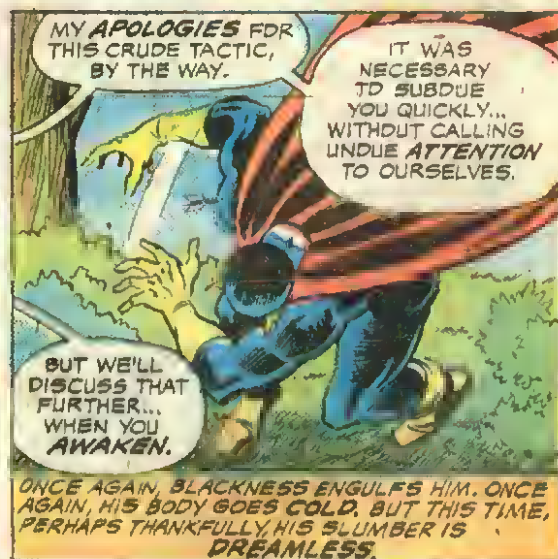
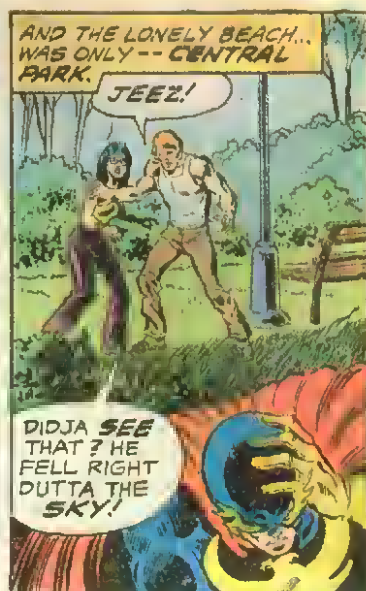
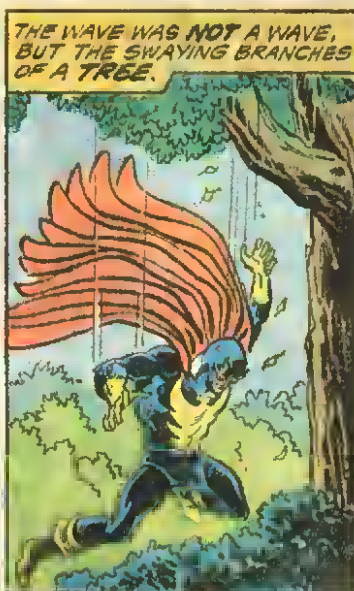
HE CALLS OUT HER NAME, AGAIN AND AGAIN, LOUDER EACH TIME.

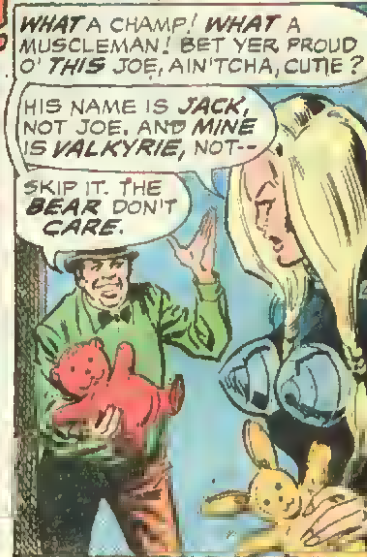
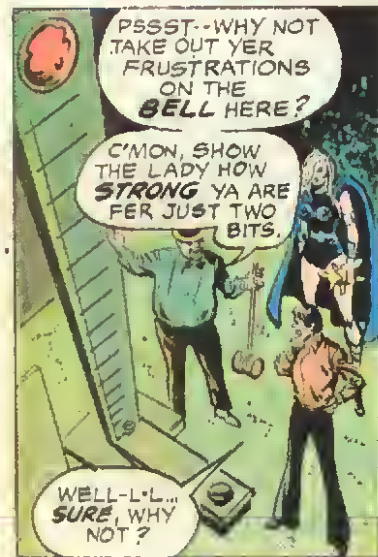
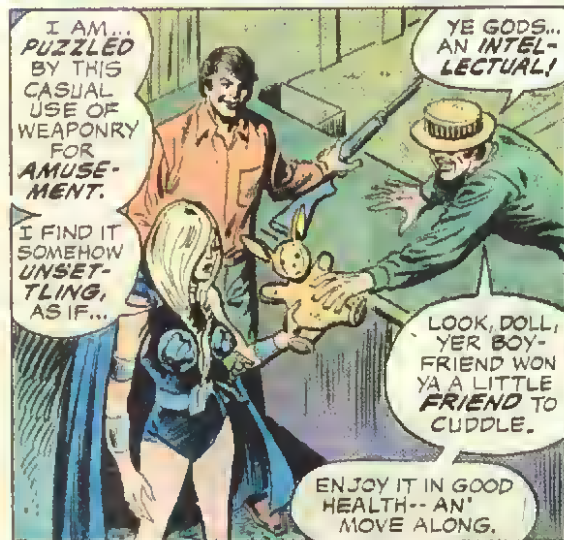
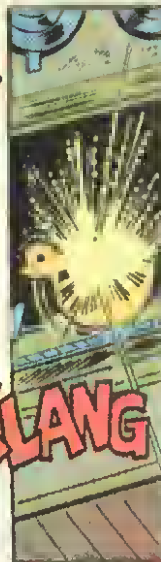
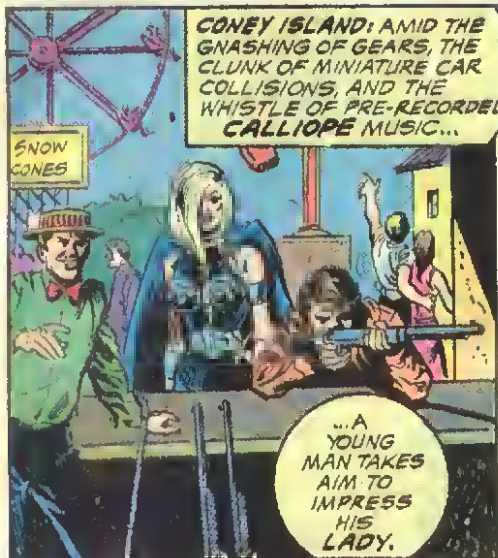


BUT SHE WILL NOT RESPOND, AND HE CANNOT REACH HER. SHE DISAPPEARS INTO THE CHURNING WATERS.



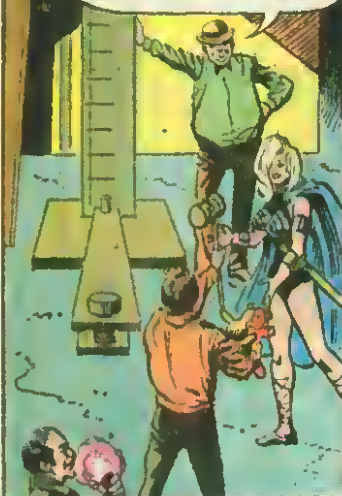
LEAVING NIGHTHAWK ALONE, WRACKED WITH GUILT, AND HELPLESS IN THE PATH OF AN IMMENSE, ONRUSHING WAVE.



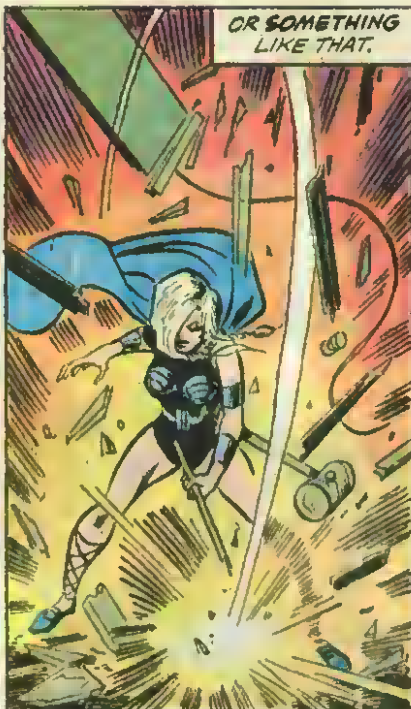


"I'M AFRAID," VAL SAYS, "I'VE NO MORE NEED OF THE BEAR THAN THE HARE, BUT I WOULD RELISH THE OPPORTUNITY TO GAUGE MY STRENGTH."

SURE, SURE--ON THE HOUSE. IT'LL BE GOOD FER A YOK.



OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.



IF I UNDERSTAND THE WORKINGS OF THESE GAMES... YOU NOW OWE ME AN ANIMAL.

ISN'T THAT CORRECT?



DON'T SAY A WORD. DON'T ARGUE. DON'T ASK QUESTIONS. JUST FOLLOW MY LEAD--AND RUN!

I WILL NOT!! UNHAND ME, MR. NORRIS, OR I--



AND I'VE HAD IT WITH THIS "MR. NORRIS" IDIOCY!

I'M YOUR HUSBAND, BAR--VAL. IT'S NOT LIKE THIS IS OUR FIRST DATE.



MUST WE HAVE THIS DISCUSSION YET AGAIN? I INHABIT YOUR WIFE'S BODY, MIST-- JACK-- BUT I AM A WHOLLY DIFFERENT PERSONA, CREATED TO LAY BARE MAN'S FOOLISH NOTION OF HIS SUPERIORITY TO WOMAN!

BOON OR CURSE, THAT IS MY NATURE, AND YOU MUST ACCEPT ME AS I AM.

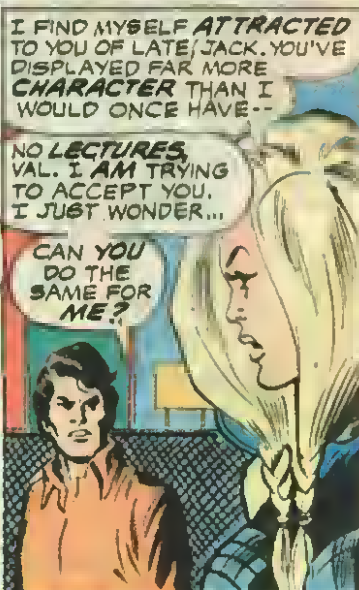


IS THAT RIGHT?

I FIND MYSELF ATTRACTED TO YOU OF LATE, JACK. YOU'VE DISPLAYED FAR MORE CHARACTER THAN I WOULD ONCE HAVE--

NO LECTURES, VAL. I AM TRYING TO ACCEPT YOU. I JUST WONDER...

CAN YOU DO THE SAME FOR ME?



THE OZARKS, SOUTHERN MISSOURI: THERE'S STILL GENUINE FORESTLAND HERE...



... GREAT EXPANSES OF UNSPOILED NATURAL GREENERY. GREEN GRASS. GREEN TREES.

AND, AT THE MOMENT, SOME GREEN THAT ISN'T SO NATURAL.

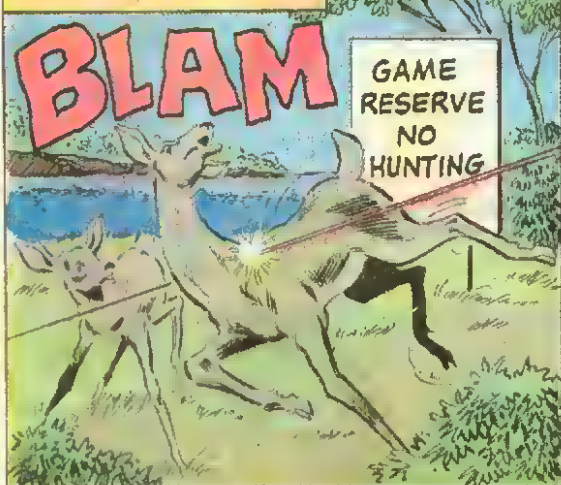


GREEN HANDS PART THE FOLIAGE... AND GREEN EYES SMILE.

THE MAN-MONSTER CALLED HULK MAINTAINS AN UNCHARACTERISTIC SILENCE. FOR EVEN THIS GAMMA-RAY-BORN CREATURE MAY BE TOUCHED BY SIMPLE BEAUTY...



... AND MOVED TO RAGE BY SENSELESS BRUTALITY.



THE DOE LIES UNMOVING, AND HER FAWN IS LIKEWISE STILL... FROZEN WITH FEAR.



HOPE YA LIKE DEER MEAT, ROCKY! SHE'S ALL OURS.

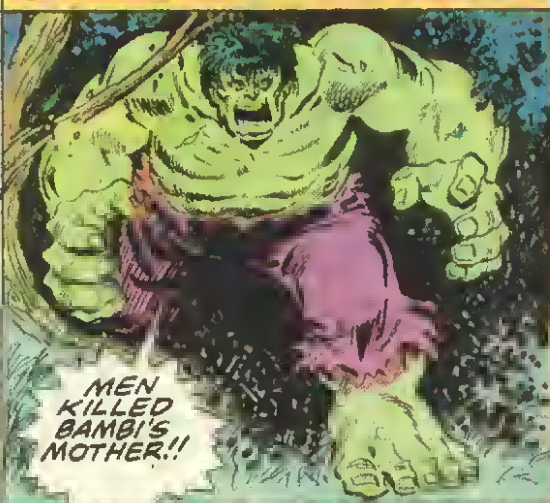
I AIN'T TOO CRAZY ABOUT THE TASTE, MYSELF. I'M A BEEF MAN, I GUESS...

HARRY? D-DID YOU HEAR SOMETHIN' GROWL?



SOMETHIN'S WATCHIN' US--AN' IT'S COMIN' CLOSER!

TWO AWFUL WORDS: "HARRY--LOOK!" THE HUNTERS WHIRL ABOUT TO CONFRONT...



MEN KILLED BAMBI'S MOTHER!!

SPEECHLESS.



DEFENSELESS.



BREATHLESS.



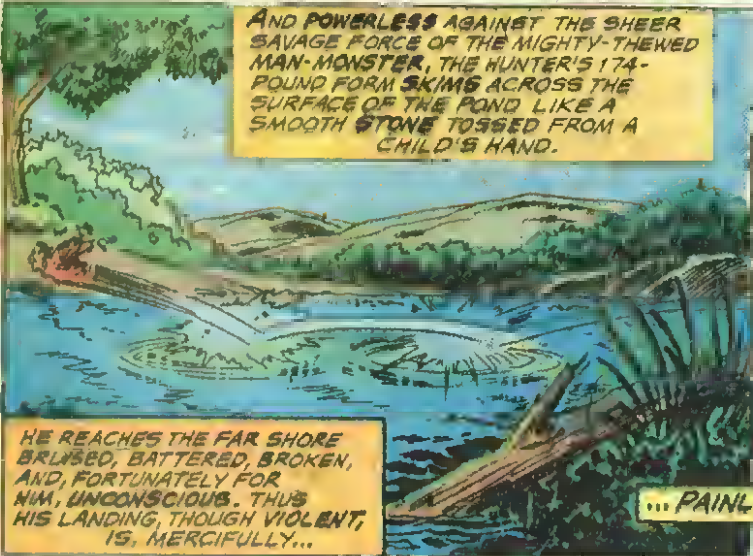
SHAMELESS.



HOPELESS.



AND POWERLESS AGAINST THE SHEER SAVAGE FORCE OF THE MIGHTY-THEWED MAN-MONSTER, THE HUNTER'S 174-POUND FORM SKIMS ACROSS THE SURFACE OF THE POND LIKE A SMOOTH STONE TOSSED FROM A CHILD'S HAND.



HE REACHES THE FAR SHORE BRUISED, BATTERED, BROKEN, AND, FORTUNATELY FOR HIM, UNCONSCIOUS. THIS HIS LANDING, THOUGH VIOLENT, IS, MERCIFULLY...

... PAINLESS.





BAMBI IS ALL ALONE NOW... NO MOTHER... NO PLACE TO GO...

HULK CAN'T BE BAMBI'S MOTHER...

...JUST LIKE HULK.



BUT HULK WILL BE BAMBI'S FRIEND... TAKE CARE OF BAMBI... ONLY...

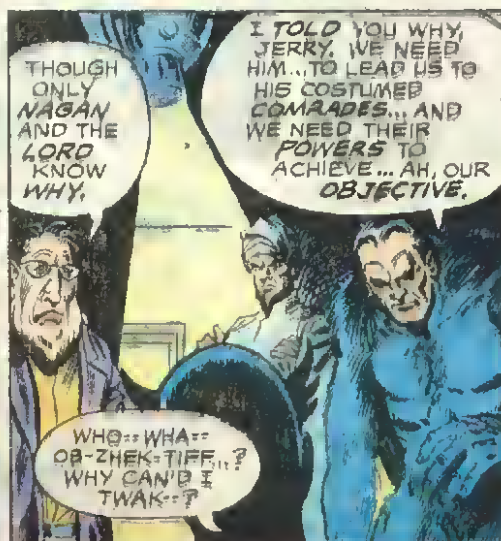


ONLY HULK DOESN'T KNOW HOW. HULK NEEDS A SMART PERSON TO TELL HIM.



ELSEWHERE, A RUDE AWAKENING!

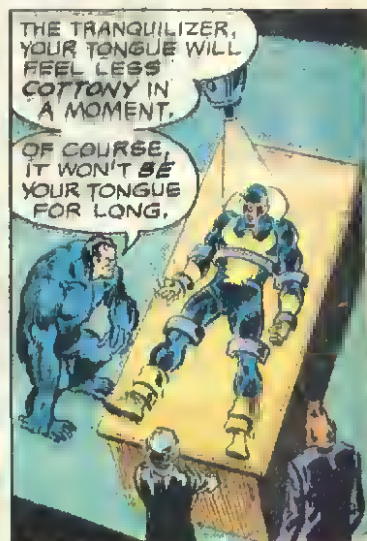
WELCOME BACK, NIGHTHAWK. WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.



THOUGH ONLY NAGAN AND THE LORD KNOW WHY.

I TOLD YOU WHY, JERRY. WE NEED HIM... TO LEAD US TO HIS COSTUMED COMRADES... AND WE NEED THEIR POWERS TO ACHIEVE... AH, OUR OBJECTIVE.

WHO? WHA? OB-ZHEK-TIFF...? WHY CAN'T I TWAK...?



THE TRANQUILIZER, YOUR TONGUE WILL FEEL LESS COTTONY IN A MOMENT.

OF COURSE, IT WON'T BE YOUR TONGUE FOR LONG.



CHONDU, OUR MYSTIC IN THE TURBAN, WILL BE USING IT--AND ALL YOUR BODILY PARTS--AFTER THE TRANSPLANT.



ONCE WE'VE CHECKED YOU OUT, MADE SURE OUR DRUG DID YOU NO HARM--

--WE'LL BE PLACING HIS BRAIN IN YOUR SKULL.

B-BUT... WHAT ABOUT... MY BRAIN...?

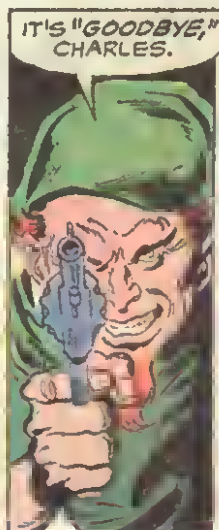
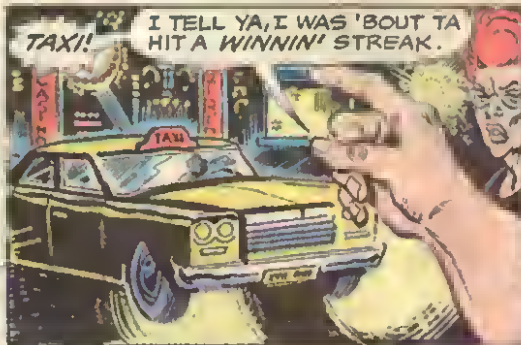
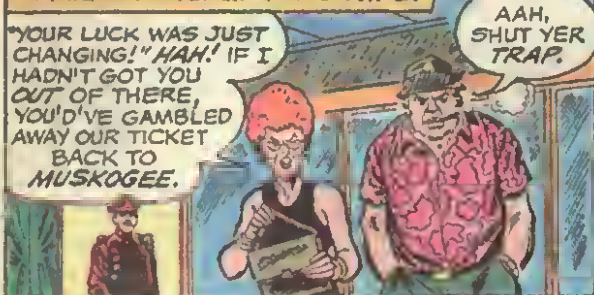


OH, THAT. WELL, UNLESS WE FIND SOME USE FOR IT, I IMAGINE WE'LL SIMPLY TOSS IT AWAY.

STRANGE INTERLUDE: "THE STRIP" IN LAS VEGAS, GARISH MONUMENT TO OBDURATE MIDDLE AGE, WHERE SAMMY DAVIS JR. IS STILL CONSIDERED "WITH-IT," WHERE "WITH-IT" IS STILL CONSIDERED CURRENT SLANG, WHERE BALD MEN WITH BEER GUTS FROM OKLAHOMA VACATION FOR A TASTE OF THE SWINGIN' LIFE.



MEET ONE OF THOSE OKLAHOMANS, CHARLES "WHIZZO" LESTER... AND HIS WIFE.



MANHATTAN, SEVERAL HOURS LATER:

HULK WILL TAKE
BAMBI TO
MAGICIAN'S
HOUSE!

MAGICIAN
IS HULK'S
SMART
FRIEND.
MAGICIAN
WILL KNOW
HOW--

WAIT! HULK SEES
ANOTHER FRIEND!
HULK SEES--
BIRD-NOSE!

THE HULK! NAGAN
WAS **CORRECT!** I HAD
ONLY TO REMAIN IN
FLIGHT **LONG** ENOUGH
TO ENCOUNTER ONE OF
NIGHTHAWK'S ALLIES.



BIRD-NOSE IS
SMART, TOO! BIRD-
NOSE WILL COME
WITH HULK TO
MAGICIAN'S
HOUSE?

MAGI--?
YES. OF
COURSE...

...MY
FRIEND.

INTERESTING. NAGAN KNEW OF NIGHTHAWK'S
ASSOCIATION WITH THE HULK FROM NEWS-
PAPER ACCOUNTS OF THE **SONS OF THE
SERPENT INCIDENT.***

BUT NO MENTION OF
A **MAGICIAN** WAS
MADE IN THOSE
STORIES.

NO MENTION
OF **NIGHTHAWK**,
EITHER, ACTUALLY.
ONLY REPORTS OF
A WING-CAPED
MAN.

*DEFENDERS #22-25.--MARV.

"APPARENTLY, HE AND THIS
CONJURER AND THE
ALSO-UNNAMED WOMAN
INVOLVED HAVE NO WISH
TO GARNER
PUBLICITY.

"HAD NAGAN NOT **FOUGHT**
NIGHTHAWK BEFORE*, WE
MIGHT HAVE BEEN AS IGNOR-
ANT AS THE **PUBLIC** OF THE
GROUP HE BELONGS TO.

"SUPERHEROES WHO GUARD
THEIR PRIVACY AS ZEALOUSLY
AS WE **HEADMEN**--A NOVEL
IDEA, THAT."

MASTER...?

YOU'VE
GUESTS,
MASTER.

AND TYPICALLY,
THEY'VE ARRIVED
AT MY
RECREATION
TIME. OH,
VERY WELL....!

*DEFENDERS #21.--MARV.

ANNOYED, BUT EVER THE GRACIOUS HOST, DR. STRANGE ADJOURNS TO THE PARLOR.

GREETINGS, HULK--NIGHTHAWK, WHAT BRINGS YOU TO--

FASCINATING...!

AH, I THINK I SEE A FOUNDLING, EH?

PARDON ME... BEFORE YOU TWO GET ABSORBED IN THE FAWN... THIS SCULPTURE. IT'S A GENUINE PRE-CATAclysmic ARTIFACT, ISN'T IT? THE DEMON MANTOK, IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN?

HOW DID YOU COME TO ACQUIRE IT?

A GIFT. NO MORE NEED BE SAID. I HADN'T REALIZED YOU WERE FAMILIAR WITH ESOTERIC ART, KYLE, HOW...?

OH. BY ACCIDENT. AN ARTICLE IN NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.

REALLY?

ENOUGH TALK ABOUT STUPID ROCK!

MEN KILLED BAMBI'S MOTHER!

GOOD GRIEF, DOC-- DON'T TELL ME YOU TOOK HIM TO THE MOVIES?

GIRL IS SMART, TOO! GIRL WILL HELP HULK TAKE CARE OF BAMBI?

UNREAL. SHOW-AND-TELL TIME IN DR. STRANGE'S CLASS-ROOM SANCTORUM. WANNA SEE OUR BEAR AND BUNNY?

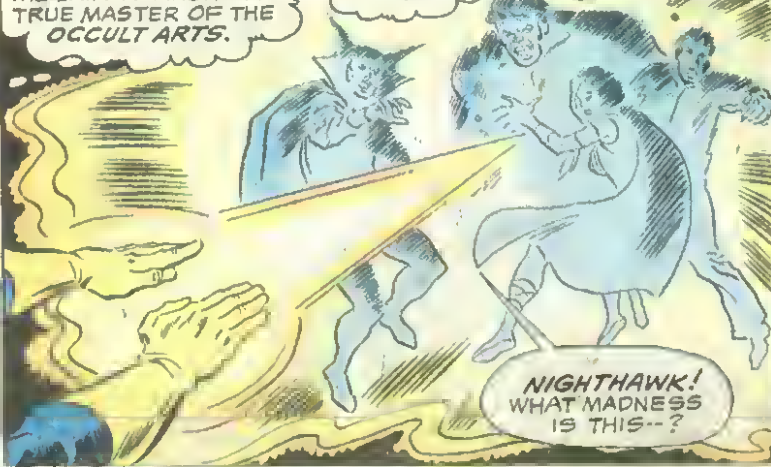
DR. STRANGE?! THEN MY SUSPICIONS ARE CONFIRMED!

WE'VE STUMBLERD ONTO FAR MORE THAN NAGAN DARED DREAM. I KNEW IT WHEN I SAW THAT STATUETTE.

ONLY ONE SUCH AS I--
CHONDU THE MYSTIC--
COULD HAVE RECOGNIZED
THE LAIR OF ANOTHER
TRUE MASTER OF THE
OCCULT ARTS.

JUST AS I ALONE OF THE THREE
HEADMEN POSSESS THE MEANS
TO CAPTURE SO FORMIDABLE
A FOE!

HARDLY MADNESS--"SOR-
CERER SUPREME." RATHER,
THE METICULOUSLY CON-
CEIVED STRATEGY OF
THREE OF THE MOST
BRILLIANT MINDS ON
EARTH.



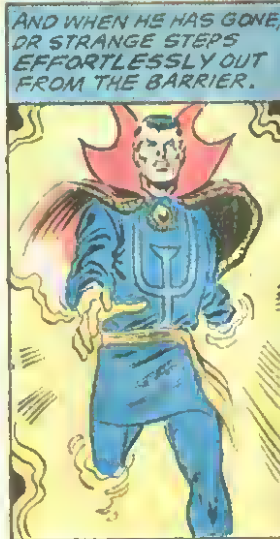
NIGHTHAWK!
WHAT MADNESS
IS THIS--?



I'LL
RETURN.
HAVE
NO FEAR.



SO SAYING,
CHONDU
DEPARTS.



AND WHEN HE HAS GONE,
OR STRANGE STEPS
EFFORTLESSLY OUT
FROM THE BARRIER.



"PARALYZED,"
INDEED!
YOU, TOO, MY
FRIENDS--
COME OUT!



HUNH? WHAT
HAPPENED?
BIRD-NOSE
DID MAGIC
TRICK?

SOMETHING LIKE THAT,
HULK-- SAVE THAT I
DOUBT OUR ASSAIL-
ANT WAS TRULY
NIGHTHAWK.

THEN
WHO--?



A THIRD-RATE
SORCERER AT
BEST, JACK--
BUT ONE WHO
HAS, IT WOULD
SEEM, ALREADY
PROVED DANGEROUS
TO ONE
DEFENSE.



I SUGGEST WE
LEARN HIS IDENTITY
AND HIS
MOTIVES...

...AND THE
WHEREABOUTS
OF THE TRUE
NIGHTHAWK...
AT,
ONCE!

STAY
HERE,
BAMBI.
HULK
WILL
COME
BACK!

SO--I'VE A NEW YOUNG BODY, AND THE HEADMEN HAVE AN INVINCIBLE ARMY-TO-BE.

NOT A BAD NIGHT, ALL IN--

HALT!

WHAT--? GREEN FIRE! THE FLAMES OF THE FALTINE! BUT WHO--?

NO!!

HALT, IMPOSTER! WE DO NOT WISH TO HARM YOU, BUT WE REQUIRE INFORMATION-- AND WE MEAN TO HAVE IT!

AND I MEAN TO RESIST, STRANGE-- WITH ALL THE POWER AT MY COMMAND!

SO SWEARS CHONDU-- ON THE NAME OF KUUBAR, DEVOURER OF DEMONS!

STEPHEN-- HIS SORCEROUS BURST-- DRAINING OUR STRENGTH-- ARAGORN CANNOT BEAR OUR WEIGHT-- FALLING--!

TRY TO LAND SAFELY, THEN-- AND LEAVE THIS BATTLE TO ME.

WITHOUT WAITING FOR VAL'S REPLY...

...THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS WHIRLS IN MID-AIR, AND...!

EYES OF OSHTUR CLOSE UPON THIS ONE--

--AND WHISK HIM BEYOND THIS VALE OF EXISTENCE!

NOW OPEN ONCE MORE, O GODDESS' ORBS--!

OPEN AND PERMIT ME TO FOLLOW!



FOR IT'S TOO DEADLY A WAR
WE WAGE--A PERIL TO EARTH
ITSELF, WITH THE ENERGIES
WE SHALL UNLEASH.

SO LET US STAGE
OUR COMBAT *HERE*--
PAST THE BOUNDS
OF PHYSICAL
REALITY--

--WHERE
WE MAY DO
VIOLENCE
ONLY UNTO
ONE
ANOTHER!

HIS POWER IS
ENORMOUS!
MY MIND IS
MERELY
CAPABLE OF
SEEING
INTO OTHER
REALITIES.

HE MOVES
ABOUT *BETWEEN*
THEM, SEEMINGLY
WITHOUT EFFORT,
WITHOUT
DISORIENTATION!

IF I'M TO BE THE
VICTOR IN THIS
STRUGGLE, I MUST
EMPLOY *EXTRAOR-*
DINARY MEASURES.

THE MIND-AMPLIFY-
ING DRUG JERRY
MORGAN CREATED
FOR ME!*

IF I CAN BUT
ENDURE THE
PAIN OF ITS
EFFECT
ON ME...

I SHALL BE
THE *EQUAL*...
OF DR.
STRANGE...

I SHALL...
I SHALL...

I--

*I
AM!!*

* ALSO UTILIZED IN DEFENDERS #21, BUT
IT HAD TO BE INJECTED THEN. THEY'VE
MADE IMPROVEMENTS SINCE.--M.



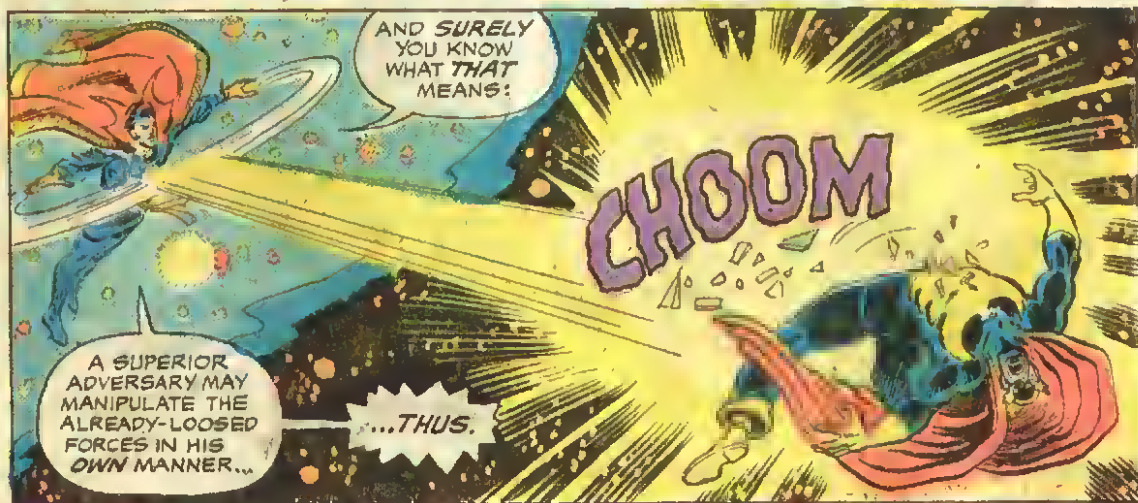
"INDEED, I THOUGHT I'D WRAP THEM TO **EMBRACE** YOU... TIGHTER... **TIGHTER**... UNTIL THEIR FACES SOLIDIFY INTO **CRYSTAL**..."



A CLEVER CAMOUFLAGE FOR THE CRYSTAL RINGS OF CAA-FU... BUT IT'S SO **FEEBLE** A SPELL, SO EASILY **BROKEN**. I ABANDONED IT LONG AGO.



VARIATIONS ON SUCH AN ENCHANTMENT ARE SO **POINTLESS**, THE NATURE OF THE SPELL REMAINS **UNCHANGED**.

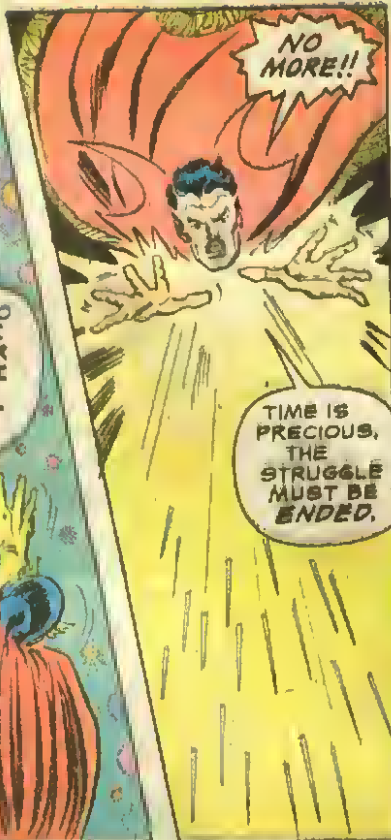




HAVE YOU HAD ENOUGH? SHALL WE RETURN? I CAN BE RUTHLESS IF--

I ASK NO MERCY! I AM YOUR MATCH! I CAN DEFEAT YOU!

AND IN THE NAME OF DREAD NILRAC--



TIME IS PRECIOUS, THE STRUGGLE MUST BE ENDED.



AND BY REASON OF YOUR OWN VANITY, THAT CONCLUSION MUST AND SHALL ARRIVE PAINFULLY.

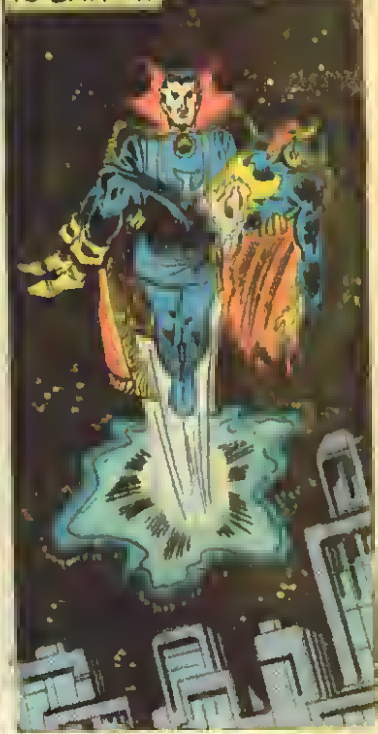


DESPITE APPEARANCES, THIS HAS NOT BEEN AN EASY VICTORY FOR THE MYSTIC MASTER.

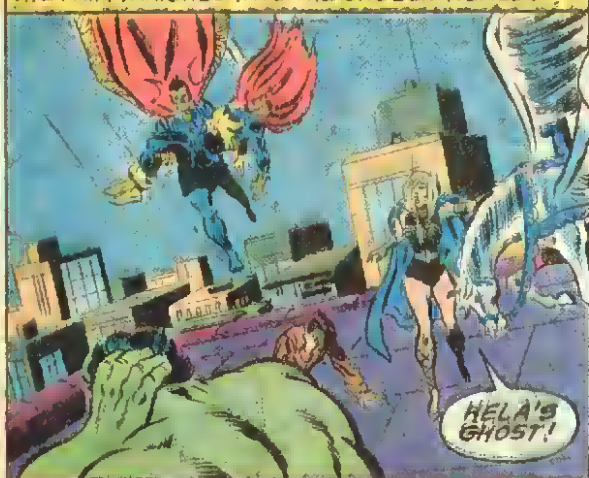
HIS FOE'S COSTUME HAD BOTH A CONSTANT DISTRACTION (A NO-HOLDS-BARRED MAGICAL DUEL WITH NIGHT-HAWK?) AND AN EVER-PRESENT REMINDER OF HIS FRIENDS' PERIL.



IT'S THE LATTER THAT WEIGHS ON DR. STRANGE'S MIND AS HE CROSSES THE GULF OF DIMENSIONS BACK TO EARTH.



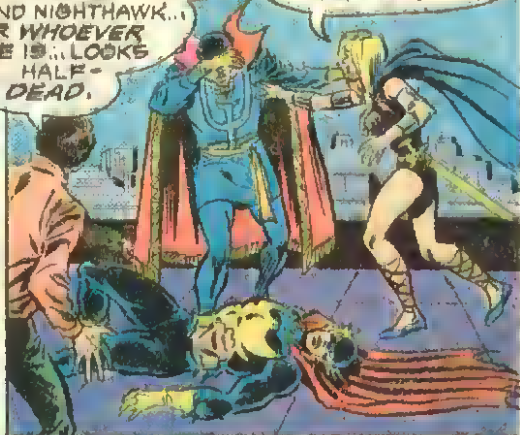
HERE, BARELY A MOMENT HAS PASSED SINCE THE PAIR VANISHED INTO THE UNSEEN WORLD.



HELA'S GHOST!

IT'S ALL OVER-- THAT FAST? YOU LOOK EXHAUSTED, DOC. AND NIGHTHAWK... OR WHOEVER HE IS... LOOKS HALF-DEAD.

WHAT TRANSPIRED BETWEEN YOU TWO? YOU MUST TELL US, STEPHEN.



AND WHEN THE TALE HAS BEEN RECOUNTED...

THE CONFLICTING EMOTIONS WORE UPON YOU MORE THAN YOU IMAGINED... WIELDING SUCH POWER AGAINST...

BUT NOW ALL THAT REMAINS IS TO UNMASK THE IMPOSTOR. MAY I PROCEED?

PLEASE, VAL. WE MUST KNOW.



EVEN NOW, WE CAN ONLY BE CERTAIN WE SHAN'T SEE THE FACE OF--

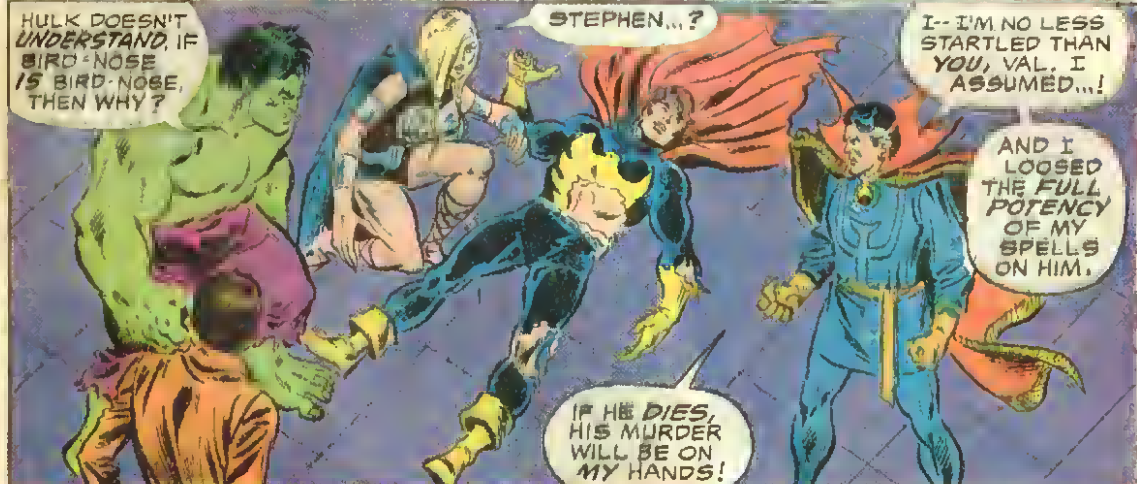


OOH

STEPHEN... IT IS HIM!!

IT IS KYLE RICHMOND!!

HULK DOESN'T UNDERSTAND, IF BIRD-NOSE IS BIRD-NOSE, THEN WHY?



STEPHEN...?

I-- I'M NO LESS STARTLED THAN YOU, VAL. I ASSUMED...

AND I LOOSED THE FULL POTENCY OF MY SPELLS ON HIM.

IF HE DIES, HIS MURDER WILL BE ON MY HANDS!

NIGHTHAWK'S EXORCISM-- KYLE RICHMOND'S LIFE STORY-- THE FOURTH HEADPERSON-- AS THE MYSTERY DEEPENS EVEN FURTHER, AND THE DEFENDERS PLAY THAT POPULAR PARLOR GAME--

MUSICAL MINDS!